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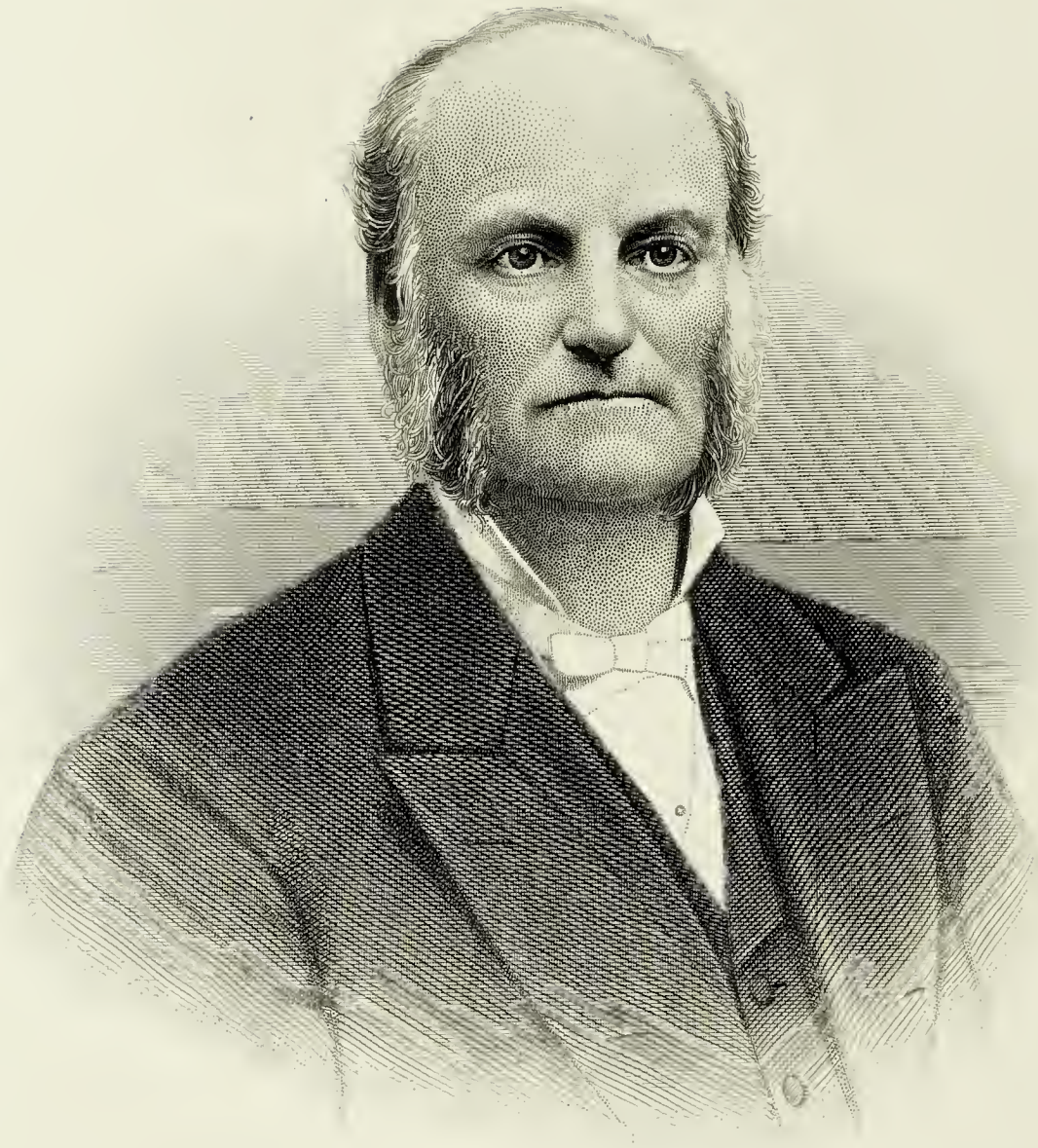

Yours very Truly
H. M. Knight

# MEMORIAL SKETCH

OF

# HENRY MARTIN KNIGHT, M.D.,

LATE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE SCHOOL FOR
IMBECILES AT LAKEVILLE, CONN.

BY

GURDON W. RUSSELL, M.D.

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# IN MEMORIAM.

[Having been requested by the Directors of the School for Imbeciles to prepare a Memorial of the late Dr. Knight, I have brought together the following, — giving due credit to each one, — compiled in part from a sketch of him by his brother, remarks made at his funeral by his pastor, and also extracts from a newspaper article written by myself shortly after his death. And there has been added to this such other thoughts, suggestions, and remembrances as have been brought to my notice by his friends, or have occurred to me during this writing. — *G. W. R., March, 1888.*]

IT seems proper to commence this Memorial with a brief life history by his brother:

"Henry Martin Knight was born August 11, 1827, at Stafford, Conn., and died at Fernandina, Florida, January 22, 1880.

"He was the fifth son of Joseph and Ruba Knight. His father was settled as pastor over the Congregational Church at Stafford, and was known far and wide among the clergy as Father Knight. During a long ministry he

suffered severely from a distressing malady, and often, when unable to stand, would preach while seated in a chair in his own house to his congregation there gathered. This steadfast adherence to duty, at any cost, was transmitted fully to his son. Amidst these influences his boyhood was passed in the healthful atmosphere of the country at Stafford, and later among the hills of Granby, and Peru, Massachusetts. The strict economy of a country minister's home, with a large family to provide for with a small salary, early fostered energy, self-reliance, and perseverance in the face of apparently discouraging circumstances. His education was acquired by his own efforts, energy, and self-denial. At the age of sixteen he entered Williston Seminary, in East Hampton, Mass., already a celebrated institution. His vacations were occupied in teaching school; this led him at one time to Norfolk, where he became acquainted with his future wife, Miss Mary Phelps.

In 1847 he commenced the study of medicine with Dr. Smith of Munson, Mass., and afterwards studied with Dr. Miner of South Braintree, Mass. He graduated at the Berk-

shire Medical College, Pittsfield, Mass., in 1849; was soon after married, and commenced the practice of medicine at Stafford Springs. In 1851 he removed to Lakeville, and entered into partnership with Dr. Benjamin Welch, a well-known practitioner of that place. He was actively engaged in his profession until the current of his life-work was changed in the direction of the care of weak and feeble-minded children. He was ever ready to respond to the calls of the suffering, knowing no difference in this respect between rich and poor. He fairly earned the title of the 'beloved physician.'

In 1854 he was elected to the Legislature, and was appointed one of a committee to ascertain the number of imbecile children in this State. The knowledge acquired while serving on this committee, together with his previous study and observation, inspired him with the idea of founding the school which is his best monument and memorial. In 1856 he presented his plans to the legislature, and asked that Connecticut should establish a school for imbeciles similar to those already instituted by Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. The measure passed

the House, but was defeated in the Senate by one vote. In 1858, abandoning the hope of State aid in establishing the enterprise, he gave up general practice and opened his own house for the reception of feeble-minded patients, meeting with such success that six years later he erected the main wing of the present large building. Later this was enlarged by appropriations from the State, which eventually recognized the utility and importance of the institution. After many discouragements and rebuffs, which would have led most men to give up the project, public sympathy and interest were aroused, and a law was enacted giving aid and support to a limited number of children — the State's sad and helpless ones who had found in him a friend and advocate.

"He died when he was entering a period of permanent prosperity, — when the heavy work of urging, arguing, and pleading was mainly over, and an assured support was secured."

This brief sketch shows us in a graphic manner how diligent he was in obtaining his education, and how persevering he was in push-

ing his plans; the very obstacles which he met were incentives to overcome them.

I knew him for nearly a quarter of a century, and was somewhat familiar with his work. Commencing in a moderate way in his own residence, he developed in the course of a few years his methods of instruction and care of feeble-minded children, until at the time of his death he had under his supervision somewhere about one hundred of them. From that humble beginning in his own home there arose the Connecticut School for Imbeciles; the contrast between these early efforts, which I first saw in 1858, and the extended establishment at the time of his death was very great. It was the natural outcome and positive accomplishment of a man who was earnest in his convictions and resolute in his actions. The school had become well known in this and neighboring States; he had secured sympathizing and supporting friends; his townsmen admired such energy, and were proud of him; and his professional brethren, who sympathized with him, and who always are sympathizers in such humanitarian work, gave him their cordial encour-

agement. He had acquired a very favorable reputation in his specialty.

His endeavors to enlist the co-operation of the State were not successful for some time; his projects were regarded as too visionary for contributions of the public money. Nothing could be done with these people, it was thought, and why waste upon them either money or time which were better spent elsewhere and on other objects. I met him on one occasion just as the legislature had adjourned without granting him aid; his pleas before the committees were patiently listened to, but he obtained no help; while a few wished him success, the majority was against him; the appropriations were needed for other objects. It was the old story, "go thy way for this time." There is brought before me vividly, as I write now, many years after the event, the subdued tone and sadness of his countenance; he was as one exceedingly fatigued by his labors. But though disappointed he was not discouraged, and felt sure that the time would come when his expectations would be realized and he should receive that public recognition which he deserved. It was

especially noticed (and it was a beautiful trait in his character) that he was not now, nor at any time, as far as I know, loud in his blame of those who were not in accord with him. He recognized fully that new propositions must be examined from all sides by many men of divers thoughts and ways of thinking, and that, after prolonged discussions, the right conclusion would generally be reached; and so he said, "I will be patient," and went again to his individual work. When we remember how many claims are made upon the public treasury for schemes which are visionary or selfish we may excuse the legislator who is careful in his scrutiny, and prudent of public funds. If a proper request is occasionally refused, yet it too often happens that projects are successful which ought never to have been granted. If the world is often ungrateful, it is also often overgenerous.

A few faithful friends, however, rallied about him, cheered and supported him, and enabled him to continue in his good work; he was not easily to be cast down. He labored on patiently, and after some years of hard toil, with discour-

agements which would have broken down a less hopeful man, he began to reap his reward. The success of the school was recognized, and the State began to afford him some aid in the support which it gave to poor pupils. His family was growing up around him, aiding and taking an interest in his work. As far as human eye could see he was receiving the reward of years of labor and anxiety.

And when he was entering upon the fruition of it he was suddenly taken away; and so it fell to others to carry out his humane and efficient plans, and to labor in that work to which he consecrated and gave up his life.

Yes, he gave up his life for this work in a most unselfish manner, — in a path generally considered most disagreeable and unpromising; and with a perseverance which was wonderful, wrought out and brought to an acknowledged success the truth that much could be accomplished in the instruction of mentally-feeble children. When we consider how many there are in this condition, through no fault of their own, but often through the fault of their parents, — that they are regarded generally with

disfavor, and are likely to be ill-treated, — we may thank God that it is put into the heart of some men to work diligently for their improvement. The cases which he has related to me of his success in bringing some from an entire neglect of themselves to a comfortable condition of life, were enough to establish his skill and humanity. To say that it is better that all these children should die young is to say that it is better that we should be relieved of all pain and trouble in an instant and at our own will, without regard to circumstances. The pagan may destroy all feeble and deformed children at their birth, or if they do not agree with his own ideas of beauty; but the christian accepts the burdens which are placed upon him, and strives to make them as light as possible.

I never heard him boastingly or selfishly exalt himself on his success; but if he ever did cherish the feeling that he had done a good thing it was with a heartfelt thankfulness for the accomplishment of benefit to others, rather than with any vain glorying of himself. When we see a man so conscientious in his work as he was, and where so few are willing to labor, then

I think we are bound not alone to accord to him all honor, but to hold up his hands and give him such substantial aid as the good and faithful servant always deserves. As his pastor said of him, "he gave himself freely for others," and I recognize among the men and women whom I have known, few who labored to do their duty more faithfully, and who did it not with an eye to man service, but conscientiously, and in the sight of God.

What a wonderful enthusiasm he possessed! To see him take his children in his arms or upon his knees, and talk to them in evident pleasure, one would say, now this man is in earnest; they are pleased with these attentions, and appreciate that kindness of heart which is so devoted to them. It did not disturb him if, as sometimes happened, no immediate recognition was shown, or if the dull and listless countenance gave no indication that any impression was made. But in all my acquaintance with him he showed no signs of disgust, nor gave any utterances of disappointment or peevishness, if his advances were not readily noticed. And in that patience and firm belief in faithful

teaching lay the great difference between our friend and most of the world, and showed how much of love he had in his work. His brother well says of him, that "he was a man of consecrated heart, and did his work not merely as a secular business, but from the purest and highest motives; and he loved it. It enlisted his soul and whole being in a religious sense."

This patient continuance in well-doing is spoken of by all his friends. Says the Rev. Mr. Kitchell, in his funeral address, "The most marked features of his character and life were spiritual and noble, such as we delight to dwell on, and such as aid us in placing him in that higher realm, where it is our comfort to place him. . . . He gave his money, his influence, his time, his strength, yes, his life at last, for the sake of his fellows. For his friends, for the unfortunate, for the wretched in any sort, he was ready always to spend and be spent. . . . He gave himself to the weak-minded unfortunate. Twenty years he was a successful medical practitioner. His winning address, his rare and quick intuitiveness, his ready sympathy, had made him in all your households the

'beloved physician.' With these qualities it is safe to say that any prize of his profession lay before him, whether here, or in any other sphere to which ambition might have led him. But his heart became interested in the needs of the imbecile, and gradually he left everything else to alleviate their wretched condition. As the result, he built up about himself as his life work the school at Lakeville, and in that work the great feature is a tender and generous humanity. We call it his life work — and it does fitly represent the quality of his soul — yet how small a part it seems of what he was and did.

"But if we love them who love us, what thank have we? He loved and gave himself for the wretched and degraded of every sort, especially for the intemperate. You remember the enthusiasm and the labors of his life in this direction. . . . A second feature in his character was, he gave himself freely to his Saviour. He gave himself to Christ in the same wholehearted, decided way in which he loved his fellows; he did not keep anything back. You know how strong his will was; yet it was most perfectly submitted. I never saw a meek-

spirited woman who was more docile, or more heartily at one with the will and the work of God. His desires were eager and strong, yet he ever seemed to follow them entirely and safely, because they led him right, — because loving the Saviour he had come himself to desire those things which are lovely, pure, and of good report.

"So all of his religious exercises partook of this heartiness. How childlike, how eager, how direct, how tender, how grand was his approach in prayer to the throne! How strong and masterful his rich voice went in sacred song before us, as his spirit went before ours. He loved the church, — it was the body of Christ to him; he honored it and loved to work through it — for temperance, for missions at home or abroad — as if he sought his own personal aggrandisement. He loved the Sunday-school; here indeed was his pride and glory; here his love for little children (and he was a little child himself with them) was blended with his love for his Saviour into a great swelling passion."

The Rev. Mr. Hallock, on the same occasion, said: "How often have the noble words of this

faithful servant (pillar in the church that he was, pillar that he is) thrilled us in our deepest purpose, and made us strong for good. And what a monument he left over there! Gathering those little ones around him in the very spirit of his Master, fitting them for their best, I see upon it the words, 'inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me.' With quick wit, with earnest views of life, with sound judgment and keen grasp of things important, I mark Dr. Knight as (in every thought and fibre of his mind and heart) a manly man. Manliness he always had, and of the truest Christian kind, while many of us found his counsel safe, and his friendship beyond price."

A friend who knew him well writes me: "Dr. Knight's well-worn books, outside his specialty, and all that bore upon sacred history (of which he was an ardent student all his life) were mainly history and biography. But he *devoured* everything which came in his way — light literature of all kinds, poetry, books upon art, architecture, farming, — all sorts of things that a man of much more leisure than he ever had, could be excused from looking into.

"In his conversation his 'hobbies' were, first, last, and always, 'the children,' as he called all the unfortunate who came under his care; next, religious subjects, to which he brought all the life, and warmth, and charm of which he was so much the master; then music, in which he was so unusually gifted, and to which he gave a devotion that would have brought him fame had he not chosen 'better things' for a life work. He was a zealot in temperance, a practical as well as theoretical farmer; and while he could *make* nothing, could direct the *mending* of everything under the sun.

"Dr. Knight was not especially fond of fishing, or hunting, except as it gave some one else pleasure. His two recreations were music and horsemanship. It would be impossible to say that he had any one peculiar line of thought in conversation; I think, instead, that the secret of his wonderful charm and magnetism was, that he had the gift of being able to be wholly absorbed, for the time, in the especial interests of those with whom he was associated.

"All who had the happiness of knowing Dr. Knight knew him alike. To-day the plainest,

most ignorant man in Lakeville would speak of him with the same appreciation of all his noble qualities that an equal would, because in all that he said or did there was always present the essence of all truth and uprightness."

His energy was wonderful; whatever he undertook he did with his whole heart. His brother says, "his mind was not rapid and sparkling, but it was sagacious and sure." I should say that his perceptions were so rapid and acute that a subject was examined and settled while some were only beginning to consider it; and his judgment was so correct that he was rarely at fault: his mind had such a practical turn that he saw right to the bottom of a thing at once. If he did not always express his opinions with rapidity it was not because he had not thought them out. In conversing with him one would say, now this man has no nonsense about him. All that he did he did with his might, whether in the practice of his profession, in the management of his own affairs, in the teaching of his specialty, in his efforts in the cause of temperance, in his labors in the Sunday-school, in his duties in the church of

which he was a deacon, in the parish choir, or in his aid of any measure of interest in the village, all this he did with his whole heart; nor was it done grudgingly, or as if from necessity, but with cheerfulness and sincerity.

He was, I think, a very plain, downright, and outspoken man, who could be independent without being offensive. When you wished for his opinion you got it, and not so overwhelmed or bound up in words that you were uncertain whether you had gotten an opinion or not. He certainly was kind and courteous; he was so by nature; and these were strengthened by his convictions.

As we see, our friend labored in all his vocations most abundantly. His large head and broad shoulders and well-developed frame afforded, one would say, a good prospect for a long life, and it was true. But no system, however strong, can always bear an excessive strain. By and by there comes a break in it, and it came to Dr. Knight, just as it has come to thousands of other men, and will come to thousands more who are neglectful of themselves. Strong men admit this in general, and say that no one

has a right to so abuse his own body, and yet go right on doing the things they ought not, hoping, probably, that the inexorable law will not be applied to themselves. And yet it must be confessed there is a certain amount of excuse for these persons, and in admiration of their powers we are inclined to forgive or regard lightly their special cases of sinning. With the many instances of slothfulness, and selfishness, and twaddling, and half-performance of duties we so often see, it is glorious, sometimes, to find a man with all his strength of mind and body, conscious of his ability, exercising his full powers, not for himself alone but, as we have said, (and it is especially true of Dr. Knight,) for others.

During the many years I knew him I was brought in contact with him on various occasions and in many ways. Sympathizing with him in his work, and visiting not unfrequently at his house, I came to have a great admiration for the man, and love for the openness and sincerity of his life. His hospitality was unbounded, and it seemed a great pleasure if he could add to the enjoyment of his friends. The

days which he gave to a number of his brethren in roaming through the surrounding towns were days long to be remembered. To men relieved for a time from the constant visit to the sick-room, they were most delightful, and no one seemed to enjoy them more than the host.

I do not consider myself competent to judge of him critically as a general practitioner. Though we were living many miles apart, yet I saw, occasionally, some of his cases, and was very favorably impressed with his methods of investigation and treatment. He had a way of looking at the essentials of symptoms and remedies which indicated his good common sense; he was not led astray by every new theory, or captivated by every newly vaunted medical agent. Though conservative, yet he was liberal enough to use all means which promised for good, according to his own convictions.

How much inclination he had for recreation, or something outside of and different from his ordinary work, I know not; a busy man like him takes his recreation in his labor, and so enjoys his life daily. But I have heard him speak

occasionally of his visits to trout streams in his neighborhood, and have no doubt that he enjoyed such short diversions.

He was a very constant attendant at medical meetings and conventions, State and National, and was an industrious member, as I know; and he especially enjoyed the gatherings of the men of his own specialty. He was frequently present at the meetings of the New England Psychological Society, at Worcester. Perhaps here was recreation for him, a little outside of and change from his daily tread at home. He was very regular in his attendance at the quarterly meetings of the Board of Medical Visitors at the Retreat for the Insane, and his counsel and advice were of much value. When the State proposed to increase its accommodations for the insane poor at Middletown, by new and less expensive buildings, he gave the project his sympathy, though it seemed to jeopardize an appropriation for his own institution; he was ready and willing to aid at all times in measures for the relief of the unfortunate.

His views on temperance were well known, and he was often enlisted as a speaker. His

brother says, "in 1874, while speaking at Plantsville on the Physical Effects of Alcohol, at the invitation of a well-known friend of temperance, he was seized with intense pain in the head and spine, so intense that while concluding he could not see the faces of his audience. This was the beginning of his ill health. This attack was the commencement of spinal irritation, and for many months he was an invalid. After rest, and travel in this country and in Europe, he was mainly restored to practical business ability, although his health never fully recovered. Continually in pain, much of the time confined to his room, he nevertheless conducted the affairs of his institution, was at his post in the Sunday-school whenever possible, and although strictly forbidden by his physicians, still spoke occasionally in public on subjects dear to his heart. The latter part of December last (1879) he left his home to spend the winter in Florida, hoping for a comfortable season, but was taken with severe symptoms at Fernandina, and died on the twenty-second of January, of rupture of the gall-duct."

~~More might be said of him — doubtless~~

Dr Knight was no ordinary man. His abilities would have won him recognition in more than one sphere, but he gloried in the privilege of service to the weak, the unchampioned and the needy.

much more by his immediate neighbors — in his praise, and in delineation of his character. But enough has been written to show that he was no ordinary man. I am thankful to have had him for a friend, and as his friend to write these words in remembrance. The language of friendship may be the language of eulogy, but here it is properly bestowed. He was indeed a noble man, a man whose neighbors, even to-day, now nine years after his death, are regarding him as more noble than when he went in and out among them. The greatness of some men goes before them, and is forgotten; the greatness of others comes after them, and the fragrance is lasting.